AN: Remember how I said that *Break* was my favourite *Poison* story? Well, I've changed my mind. *This* is now my favourite *Poison* story. Not the longest – but it comes damn close, and I think that it's the tensest one ever. Those who are of a weak disposition should leave now, because you might not come out of this alive.

Poison

Fire Sale

"I'm telling ya – I don't feel good about this, man," Sarafina said, shifting uncomfortably in her seat as she took a gulp of her lemonade. "I mean, what the hell am I supposed to do if he rattles my cover or something?"

"He won't," TPYMK assured her, sipping from his chocolate milk which he had ordered in the café. "Do you honestly expect any junkie to have a sizeable amount of brainpower with which to…?"

He trailed off when he saw the dirty glare that Sarafina was giving him. "Sorry," he said, knowing that the lioness could get quite testy when it came to her former drug addiction. Yes, those were stupid times, but she wasn't a total moron. Not now, at least.

"Why you taking me here, anyway?" Sarafina asked, surveying the busy atmosphere of the shopping mall around them. They were sat in a quiet café nestled away in the corner of the food court, which provided a more or less pleasant view of the frantic shoppers walking to and fro. "Thought we were gonna drive right over to Moto's place."

"I thought that you might appreciate a meal," TPYMK said, glancing down at an empty plate next to Sarafina's plastic cup of lemonade. It had taken her less than a minute to wolf down her cheeseburger in just a few bites. Sometimes the former detective mused that she still had something of a wild animal inside her. "You haven't been looking at your best today."

"I'm nervous," Sarafina admitted, finishing off her drink. "There's, like, a million things that could go wrong with this plan."

TPYMK rolled his eyes. "Like what?" he asked, a little tired of how Sarafina was trying to escape playing a part in the plan that he had devised. Poisoning Moto with ricin – a deadly poison which he had paid quite a handsome amount of money for – was a simple task, but only Sarafina had the capability to do it. She knew him. TPYMK didn't. If he did, then he would have been all too happy to take care of this by himself. However, that wasn't the case, and he wished that Sarafina would be more cooperative with him.

"Uh… I don't know," replied Sarafina, stuck for words. "But it's a lot of things. Don't you have, like, a Plan B or something?"

"A Plan B?" said TPYMK. "Sarafina, this is the *only* plan. The only thing that will maintain our innocence. You don't want us both to end up in prison, do you?"

"No," Sarafina said quickly. "I'm not cut out for prison. I'd rather cut my own throat open than get raped in the showers."

TPYMK narrowed his eyes in confusion and opened his mouth to respond, but then thought better of it and changed the subject. "Physical impossibilities aside," he said, "I need you to do this. It's not just for me. It's for you, too."

Sarafina leaned back in her chair, closing her eyes. She let out a soft moan. "But I don't wanna," she whined, sounding like a child who was being forced to clean their room. "I'm gonna die in there."

"No, you won't," TPYMK said. "As far as Moto is concerned, he thinks you're his friend. There's nothing suspicious going at all. It'll be fine. Come on – would I lie to you?"

"*Yes*," Sarafina was quick to say. "You would."

TPYMK exhaled deeply, unsure of what to say. "Look, all right,"

he replied, and for a moment Sarafina thought that he would change his mind. "How about I buy you a present?"

"My birthday's in August," Sarafina said, "and Christmas is way off. Why the hell would you buy me a present?"

"Well, we're in a shopping mall, aren't we?" TPYMK retorted, gesturing to the enormous moving crowd of people. "If there's anywhere to buy you a present, then it's here. Besides, you deserve it for doing this for me."

"You'll buy me something?" Sarafina said, sounding surprised by the fact. She hadn't had a present bought for her since before she became a drug addict. Her parents weren't a factor any longer, so the only person she could really count in this world was TPYMK. There wasn't anyone else, and it was likely that there never would be. "Now?"

"Yeah," TPYMK shrugged, emptying his cup of chocolate milk down his throat. "Anything you want."

"Anything I want?" Sarafina laughed, shaking her head in disbelief. "Wow. This is a new thing for you. You gonna buy me a shiny necklace next week? How about a pair of gold earrings, too?"

"I didn't think you were into that," TPYMK commented, knowing that, as far as fashion was concerned, Sarafina only sported a set of purple toenails. An incredibly ridiculous colour, but if that was what she wanted, he couldn't stop her. "However, if you *do* want a necklace, I suppose we could—"

"Nah, jerkoff," Sarafina interrupted with a smile, craning her neck in the direction of another store. "I was thinking of something else."

It didn't take TPYMK too long to spot the neon sign that said 'TOY STORE' in bright green letters.

"Really?" TPYMK said, staring at Sarafina. "You're *that* childish?"

"You said anything," replied Sarafina, her smile broadening into a grin. "You're cornered, jerkoff."

"Fine," TPYMK said, getting up from his seat and leaving the café, Sarafina following in his wake.

Five minutes later, they were both walking down an aisle filled with action figures. TPYMK mistakenly thought at first that perhaps Sarafina would be interested in a Barbie doll or a bright pink toy car, but then he lambasted himself for being so foolish. The lioness was about as tomboyish as they came, hence why she was now looking at a shelf filled with *Robot Wars* toys.

"Aw, yeah – this is the bomb, man!" Sarafina cried, plucking up the cardboard boxes containing the toys, staring at them in amazement. "They've got Hypno-Disc, and Chaos 2, and Razer, and…"

TPYMK frowning, getting the feeling that he was going to be buying the contents of this entire section for Sarafina. However, he had spent far more money on items for his own needs, such as untraceable poisons, so he figured that she deserved a treat for once.

"You want all these?" TPYMK asked, gesturing to the toys.

"No, wait…" Sarafina wandered over to a much larger box, pointing at it excitedly with a claw. "Radio-controlled Shunt. *Gotta* have one of these, too."

"Sixty dollars?" said TPYMK, reading the price tag on the shelf. He raised his eyebrows at the lioness. "Is that all?"

"Yes," Sarafina said. Then an innocent smile spread across her face. "Uh, and a *Scud the Wonder Dog* plushie, please."

Two hundred and ten dollars later, TPYMK found himself wheeling a packed trolley out of the toy store and towards the Junk-Mobile, followed by a happy Sarafina. "I seriously hope you're going to cooperate fully with me now."

"Relax, man," said Sarafina, who looked quite satisfied with her horde. "You can buy me off with anything these days. Besides, it was practically a fire sale. Those toys were available at a serious discount."

"I'll keep that in mind," TPYMK said. "Just choose somewhere other than a toy store next time."

TPYMK grunted as he was pushed into a ditch by the muscly lion, joined soon after by Bora. He was quick to rise to his feet, glaring at the guard, showing him that he wasn't to be messed with. He considered snapping the lion's neck and going straight back to the Family of Blood's shack, but he thought better of it and bit his tongue.

"Leave now," the guard ordered. "And stay out of our territory."

TPYMK said nothing. All he could do was watch as the guard turned around and headed back down the embankment, returning to his evil paymasters. It filled him with rage just to look at such a person.

But he didn't go after him. He could have, but he didn't. To try and mount an attack now would only prove to be foolish. The Family of Blood were more than prepared for such an occurrence. If they had managed to outsmart him before, then they could certainly do it again.

TPYMK's revenge could wait. Right now, he had other problems to deal with.

Bora coughed as rose to his legs from the ditch, wiping fragments of dirt from his mouth. He glanced up at TPYMK, looking unsure of what the former detective's next move might be.

Well, he was about to find out.

"So—" began Bora, but he was cut off quite abruptly.

With a roar that sounded inhuman – in fact, it sounded more

like some kind of wild animal – TPYMK grabbed Bora by the shoulders and shoved him right up against a tree trunk. The lion attempted to fight back, but he found that he could barely move a muscle.

"What the hell do you think you're—"

"Shut up," TPYMK snarled, staring right into his eyes. "If Sarafina ends up dead because of you, then I will burn down the entire HPD… with you still inside."

Bora groaned as he struggled to break free of TPYMK's iron grip, but it was no use. Eventually, however, the last human on earth let him go, and he dropped roughly to the ground.

Despite the embarrassment of being shoved around, the lion rose to his paws, staring at TPYMK with an angry look in his eyes, although it was dwarfed by the fury that the former detective felt at this moment in time.

"In case you haven't noticed, jackoff, we're done here," Bora told him firmly. "What matters to me is that I get back to HPD and tell 'em exactly where the Family of Blood are. And don't worry – we'll get your little whore out. Her butt is going down the same as they are for being a former dealer."

TPYMK remained silent, just glaring at Bora with a look of utter hated.

"You're lucky," Bora said. "I could just arrest you for assaulting an officer, but you did lead me to these no-hopers, so I think I'll let you go. Burn your file for you, too. How does that sound?"

Again, TPYMK said nothing.

Bora chuckled, shaking his head. "Thought so," he said. "Shows how ungrateful some people are." He turned and walked off down the path. "See ya."

"This isn't over," TPYMK threatened, finally speaking as he watched Bora walking away from him. "*Do you hear me?*"

This time, it was Bora who was silent.

Hago frowned as he heard the screams.

He just couldn't understand it. They had started last night and showed no signs of letting up. Whatever was going on above his lab, it was really starting to grate on his nerves. Here he was, trying to cook a huge batch of the purest Sumu on the market, and someone was yelling as if they were being tortured for hours on end. It was ridiculous.

"At last," Hago sighed as Vitani entered the lab. "I don't know what the hell you've got going on up there, but it's disrupting my concentration."

"I wouldn't worry, Hago," Vitani replied. "How's the cook going?"

"Fine, as always," Hago said with a wave of his paw. He didn't care about that; he was more interested in whoever this screaming idiot was. "But I want to know what's going on with this incessant noise."

"We have a prisoner," Vitani told him. "Zira has insisted that she be given a proper punishment, and that's what you're hearing right now."

Hago glanced up at the ceiling, where more wails of agony could be heard. "Jesus," he said, sounding shocked. "Don't you think that's a bit extreme?"

"Yes," Vitani said. She then shrugged. "But who the hell cares what I think?"

The cub turned and left the lab, leaving Hago scratching his head in confusion. He stopped to hear yet another scream from above, and then continued on with his work.

"*Damn it!*"

TPYMK kicked aside a chair in anger, sending it flying across the

kitchen and smacking right into the fridge. He didn't allow frustration to get to him often, but in this case, he had every right to lash out at inanimate objects.

He didn't care that he had been beaten, or that the Family of Blood were still dealing, or that Bora had been allowed to get away with what he did. All that mattered was that Sarafina was in their clutches.

He just couldn't take it.

They were doing things to her, he knew. Horrible things. The poor lioness was probably in unbearable pain right this moment, and there was nothing he could do about it. The one who he cared about most was on the verge of death, leaving him as nothing more than an unfortunate victim who had to bear the guilt of allowing her to be captured. If she had never been there…

Shaking his head, TPYMK left the kitchen, heading up the stairs. He didn't want to dwell on what might have been, or what he could have done. Here and now was what was important. He needed a plan.

Stopping at the top of the staircase, just outside Sarafina's room, he considered his tasks. He needed to figure out how to rescue Sarafina, kill the Family of Blood and also Bora while he was at it.

It had taken him until morning to get back home, and he didn't really know why he had returned, but he couldn't think of anything else to do. Perhaps being in a peaceful environment would provide some inspiration. Right now, though, his head felt empty.

But he would think of something, he told himself. He always did.

TPYMK considered going into Sarafina's room – just to find somewhere to sit and think – but the glow of the rising sun shining from the room down the hallway was beckoning to him,

so that's where he went instead.

The former detective stopped in the doorway, staring inside. It was a spare room, really; just some space that TPYMK had provided for Sarafina to store her massive stash of toys that he had bought for her a while ago.

Recalling the fond memory, TPYMK stepped into the room, picking up one of the small toys and turning it over in his hand. Hypno-Disc, she had called this one. The variety of other little toy robots were scattered across the room. Obviously, Sarafina had been making good use of them. She was quite a child at heart. That was something that TPYMK liked about her, though.

He brushed aside a *Scud the Wonder Dog* plushie from a sofa to the side of the room before sitting down, resting his head on his hands and racking his brains for a solution to his problem. The biggest problem that he had ever faced. This was worse than Death, by far. This time, he was fighting both sides of the law. It couldn't get any worse.

Right now, however, it didn't seem that he had any fight left in him at all.

That is, until TPYMK spotted one of the toys in the corner.

Struck by a brainwave, TPYMK stood up and knelt down in front of the toy, which was much larger than the others. He remembered that Sarafina had referred to it as Shunt, and that it was a radio-controlled toy he had paid quite a bit of money for. Still, it was nothing he couldn't handle; he had enough money to last for a good few lifetimes.

The cost wasn't of any important to him, though. A plan slowly forming in his head, TPYMK soon realised that this seemingly trivial purchase might just provide the answer to all of his problems.

It had been a long night.

Tears streaming down her cheeks, Sarafina rolled over in her cell, her throat sore from hours and hours of screaming and sobbing. She could only tremble as she stared at the metal door which sealed her tightly inside the room, wondering what in the world was in store for her next.

After having her fur messed up and her insides given a serious shock by the taser, Moto had decided to beat Sarafina black and blue, insisting frequently that she needed to "learn her lesson". Her bruises had returned once more, and most of her body was riddled with cuts from a little knife that Moto had brutally used on her. As much as she had tried to fight back, it was impossible. Her forelegs and hind legs had been shackled together, leaving her powerless to resist Moto's advances.

And those advances weren't just limited to violence, either. Oh, no – Moto had violated her in more ways than one over the course of the night. She had been raped, brutalised and tortured – sometimes all at once – by an insane maniac who showed no signs of stopping. He was a monster.

Sarafina glanced at her purple hind claws, most of which had been bitten off because Moto apparently had a sick fetish for that sort of thing. Her once beautiful looks were gone, replaced by the appearance of a dying drug addict. Things had indeed come full circle for her now.

The lioness froze as she heard the groan of the rusty metal door opening, tensing up in fear and staying still as a stone statue. She wondered that if she pretended to be dead – if she didn't breathe or move a single muscle – then maybe Moto would leave her alone. He would have no more screams to laugh at.

The theory quickly faded from Sarafina's mind, however. Knowing that creep, he would try to molest her dead corpse in order to degrade her even further. Psychos like him just didn't know when to stop. They kept going until their victim's souls had rotted away into nothingness.

Much to the lioness's surprise, it wasn't Moto who had entered

the cell, but Vitani.

Ever since being thrown into this dismal place by one of the Family of Blood's guards, the only other form of life Sarafina had seen other than Moto was Zira herself, who called in on occasion just to kick the lioness hard in the stomach and remind her of what a filthy rat she was. She didn't even count as a person to them; she was just a punching bag.

"Morning," said Vitani, putting down what Sarafina could discern from the corner of her eye – since she wasn't looking at her, but the ceiling – a tray containing a small loaf of bread and a pitcher of water. "I figured you might be hungry, so I brought you some bread and water."

Sarafina glanced up at the iron-barred window and noticed for the first time that it was indeed morning. Her thoughts were so focused on other things that she failed to notice the passage of time. This had been the longest night of her life, by far. She was hoping – praying – for hours that Moto would do some serious damage and accidentally end up killing her. Sarafina just wished to die and get it over with… but the Family of Blood were making a game of it. They wanted to see just how far they could push her before she finally passed away. It was sadistic.

Sarafina failed to respond to Vitani, who slid the tray towards her. Absent-mindedly, she picked up the small loaf of bread and took a big chunk out of it. It was the first meal she'd had in a day, and – even though it might have been poisoned – she was going to make the most of it.

She had expected Vitani to leave by this point, but the cub continued speaking to her. "I'm sorry about all of this," she told Sarafina. "But I can't control my mother. She's in charge of everything around here. If there was a way I could get you out —"

"There isn't," Sarafina interrupted, even though she was astounded to find that at least one of this gang's members didn't seem so into the job as she first assumed. "My life has

been a total waste of time. Just took me until now to realise it."

Vitani stayed silent for a few moments, before giving Sarafina a slight nod and closing the door behind her, which locked automatically with a loud *clunk!*

Having analysed every inch of the door at each opportunity she had whenever Moto left the room to get high, or masturbate, or whatever the hell else he did to please the small peanut that he called a brain, Sarafina had concluded that there was no way out. The door was made of thick steel, and she was far too small to squeeze through the bars covering the window. They were impossible to break, too. Despite the oldness of the cell, it had well and truly served its purpose. She couldn't get out.

Rolling back over to look up at the sunlight shining through the window, she considered the likelihood of TPYMK coming to her aid. She doubted it, though. As much as she knew he would try, she also knew that he would fail. The Family of Blood were better than Death when it came to security. Their lab was deep underground, and they had a security force which could shoot him to pieces in seconds.

There was also the added disadvantage of that cop Bora being with him, who she hated almost as much as Moto. It was his fault that she was here. He deserved to die, just like the rest of them. TPYMK may have murdered a baby, but he never would have sold her out like that in a million years. He was her only hope, and even *that* didn't seem like it would be enough.

You're done for, girl, Sarafina told herself. *Let's just hope that creep breaks your neck or something the next time he comes in…*

After swallowing the large portion of bread that she had torn off from the loaf, the lioness found that she was also incredibly thirsty as well. Sarafina practically lunged for the glass pitcher of water, gulping down mouthful after mouthful, which soon provided relief for her raw throat.

Wait a minute, thought Sarafina, taking her mouth away from the pitcher and feeling the surface with her paws. *Glass…*

A small glimmer of inspiration struck Sarafina's brain, and she realised that Vitani had inadvertently provided her with a way out after all.

"I don't know why you're bothering with that rat, Vitani," Zira said, smoking a joint as she lay flat on a new table that had been moved into the shack. Her enhanced sense of power after triumphing over the HPD seemed to give her the impression that she was allowed to take even more drugs now. Not something that Vitani was thrilled about, to say the least. "Who the hell cares if she gets fed or not?"

"Don't you want to torture her?" Vitani questioned, sighing as she sat down beside her mother. "You can't make her scream if she's dead."

The cub didn't mention, of course, that she had provided Sarafina with some bread and water because she felt sorry for her. If they were going to capture this lioness, then she assumed that Zira would have just had her shot in the head. Instead, she was being tortured horribly by Moto, who qualified as being among the worst of psychopaths. The screams that Sarafina let out down in the cell sent a bitter chill through her bones. If only she could end the lioness's suffering, somehow…

"Fair point, sweetie," Zira said, taking a hit of her joint. "Those yells are music to my ears. Serves her right for trying to mess with us."

"Mom, you shouldn't be smoking that," Vitani said. She was getting tired of this sadistic talk and wanted to change the subject. "You're only going to make yourself ill again—"

"*Shut up!*" Zira screamed, causing Vitani to jump in fright. "*These are my goddamn drugs, and I can smoke 'em whenever I like!*"

"But you're hurting yourself!" Vitani yelled, her anger reaching its boiling point. "How the hell are we supposed to get ahead if you end up dying—"

Vitani cried out in surprise as Zira slapped her across the face; something that she had never done before to her daughter. The cub crumpled to the floor, suppressing a sob as she stared up at her mother in horror.

"*I said shut up!*" roared Zira. "Now, get down to that lab and check on our cook! I ain't running this business so you can just sit there!"

Vitani stayed silent, paralysed.

"*Get out!*"

This time, the cub ran, bolting through the doorway and racing down towards the lab. She wiped tears from her eyes as her legs carried her further and further away from her mother, having been upset severely by Zira's actions.

She soon came to understand that this wasn't what she wanted at all. In fact, the only thing that she *did* want was to get out.

Out of this business, and away from her horrible family.

Sarafina smashed the pitcher into pieces after finishing its contents, quickly scattering the fragments of glass into the corner so no one would spot them, saving only the sharpest remnant for her escape plan. It was all she needed to get out.

Having deduced that there was no way she could cut through her shackles or pick the locks on them, she instead opted for the easiest option: lunge at Moto with the sharp piece of glass and stab him to death while the door was still open. She didn't know what she would do when she got outside, but this was the only plan she had for now. It had to work.

The lioness backed up against the wall as she heard the door slam open, hiding the shard of glass behind her back – a hard

task given that she was chained up – and watching as Moto sauntered into the den, grinning widely at her.

"I've missed you, Purple Pussy," Moto said, heading towards Sarafina. "Before I get down to business, I was thinking that maybe I could suck your toes again…"

Sarafina glanced at her chewed-up claws, which had been rendered useless when it came to defensive implements. They looked just as poorly as they did when she had been addicted to Sumu.

Still, that didn't matter now. She had a weapon that was far better than using her claws. All she needed was the right moment to strike…

"So, uh… what do you say we get down to business?" Moto asked, wiping something from his nose. Sumu, most likely. The guy was always high. Permanently, it seemed. She was lucky that this had affected his judgement, because he had left the door wide open. She had a clear path out of there. "You know how much I love your body…"

Sarafina said nothing, gripping hold of the piece of sharp glass tightly, waiting for the chance to stab the little freak in the neck. Even if she ended up dying afterwards, this would still be worth it.

Come on, you psycho, she thought, willing him to come closer. As soon as his head was down, she would attack him viciously until he stopped breathing. She would make sure that he was injured beyond recovery. It was what he deserved. *Come on…*

Keeping her hind legs at the right level – she didn't want Moto to be too far away from her – she monitored him carefully as he bent down with his teeth to put his slimy tongue on her toes.

Sarafina let out a cry of anger as she lunged at Moto with the shard of glass—

—just as Zira appeared in the doorway.

"*Moto!*"

The cub lunged backwards as Sarafina brought the glass down on the floor instead of his neck, smashing it into smaller pieces and rendering its offensive capabilities useless.

"Yo – what the hell, pussy?" Moto said, looking in Zira's direction. "I was just about to get busy! Can't a dude have a little privacy with his girl?"

"She was just about to kill you," Zira said, baring her teeth lividly at Sarafina as she stepped into the cell. She glanced into the corner of the cell, spotting the shards of glass that the lioness had hidden there. "You idiot, Vitani…"

"What the hell are you talking about?" Moto asked. "Sarafina and me – we're, like, brother and sister! She wouldn't hurt me!"

"You're lucky I arrived when I did," Zira said, glowering at Sarafina. "I was just checking to make sure that our prisoner wasn't trying to do anything sneaky – like *escape*."

Sarafina stared down at the ground in defeat, knowing that her only chance of freedom had now been cruelly wrenched away from her. She was going to die in this cell. There was no question about it.

"Dude!" said Moto, finally realising what Sarafina had been trying to do. He looked at her in disbelief. "Not cool, man!"

"Looks like we'll have to ramp up our punishment," Zira said, extending her claws. Sarafina's fear was increased tenfold. "If you didn't learn your lesson before, then you're certainly going to now."

Moto giggled in delight as Zira advanced on Sarafina, roaring loudly and lashing out with her claws.

"No… no… *no!*"

The lioness's screams returned once more – but this time they were even louder.

"Coffee for you, boss."

"Thanks, Maarifa," Bora said, picking the cup that she had placed down on the table and gratefully taking a sip. "I sure as hell need it."

He was sat at his desk in his office, happy to be there once more instead of hanging around with TPYMK and his drug-dealing accomplice. Those had been some of the worst hours of his life, and he didn't care to repeat them ever again. Fortunately, the events had provided him with some brilliant evidence that was sure to put the Family of Blood in jail for ten life sentences, so it wasn't all bad.

Still, there was the problem of that psycho TPYMK.

Bora had never trusted him. He knew that the guy was dangerous; the type of person who was more than capable of flying off the handle and killing some poor soul. He had already murdered a baby, so it was hardly surprising that he was harbouring a drug dealer who had been part of one of the biggest illegal narcotics empires Bora had ever seen.

He was glad that he had sold the slut out to the Family of Blood. They would kill her, closing the case for good, and then he and his men could move in on the gang, arrest them and close that case, too. Two birds with one stone, as the old saying went. He applauded himself for being so smart.

The detective considered the possibility of TPYMK coming after him like he threatened he would back in the forest, but it didn't seem terribly likely. People tended to lash out when they were angry – Bora knew that from years of experience – and TPYMK, as psychotic as he was, was just expelling hot air. The lion had been true to his word and torched his file, hoping that the guy would just move to some other country far away and never show his face ever again. He didn't want anything to do with that murdering scumbag after everything that had happened before. It was time to focus on other things.

Unfortunately for Bora, lightning was about to strike twice.

"*Oh, my God!*"

The lion whipped round as he heard the scream from outside his office, followed by a series of other yelps and wails from his various colleagues.

"*Jesus Christ!*"

Bora leapt to his paws and raced out of the office, sending the door almost flying off his hinges in the process. He noticed that some of the workers were hiding under the desks, cowering in fear as if an earthquake were about to hit the city. Others were stood still, sobbing and crying quietly.

"What the—" the lion began, only to be cut off rather abruptly.

"*Where is Detective Bora?*" demanded a voice, and Bora knew who it was at once.

Turning his head to the centre of the office space, the detective was confronted with the familiar face of TPYMK, who was stood on top of a table in the centre, holding a gun and staring threateningly at the crowd of officers.

And he had a bomb strapped to his chest.

TPYMK surveyed the crowd of terrified people – including Bora, which pleased him to no end – and he knew that his plan was going smoothly.

He had gotten into the building easily, keeping his trenchcoat buttoned up tight over his body, giving him the appearance of just another innocent person walking in to give a statement on how their precious lawn ornament had been vandalised by a group of rowdy teenagers. Once again, his anonymity gave him power.

However, as soon as he had worked his way into the general office space of the station, he had immediately proceeded to

punch an officer in the face and leap up onto the table, waving his gun around and yelling loudly at the crowd. Most of them had reacted with fear, while some of the officers already had guns pointed in his direction.

Then he played his trump card. Ripping open his coat – popping off some of the buttons and sending them bouncing across the floor in the process – he revealed the bomb strapped to his chest, brandishing the detonator in his other arm.

"*Put the gun down!*" demanded one of the officers, his paw shaky as he trained his gun on TPYMK.

"*You stay back!*" TPYMK shouted, his finger hovering over the detonator. "Shoot me and we all go up! Now, I'll say it again! *Where is Detective Bora?*"

More screams sounded from around the room, followed by the lion himself pushing his way through to the front of the crowd.

"*Hold your fire!*" Bora ordered. "Can't you see he's got a bomb, for Christ's sake?"

TPYMK smiled, pleased that HPD had been fooled so easily into believing that he actually had a bomb strapped to his chest. It was amazing what you could do with a few candles, an alarm clock, and the remote control from a Shunt toy. They had fallen for his fake bomb hook, line and sinker.

"Nice to see you again, Detective," said TPYMK, still smiling at Bora, who didn't look amused in the slightest. In fact, he looked rather petrified. Good. He was going to pay for what he had done to Sarafina. "Thought you'd gotten away with it, didn't you?"

The crowd looked incredibly confused, unaware of the relationship between the detective and the last human on earth. Their bitter rivalry finally seemed to be reaching its climax, and they had a front row seat.

"This is low – even for you," said Bora, warily eyeing the

"bomb" attached to his chest. The wires that TPYMK had ripped out from the gutted Shunt toy to wrap around the dynamite-shaped candles made it seem even more realistic. "Now you're a suicide bomber as well as a murderer?"

"I warned you," TPYMK said, a malevolent expression on his face. He had his teeth bared, like a lion hunting for game. "I told you what would happen."

"If you're here to kill me," said Bora, "then fine – but let these people go. They've done nothing to you."

"I don't want to kill you," TPYMK said, much to Bora's amazement. He truly hadn't been expecting this. "If I wanted that, then you'd already be dead."

Bora glared right at him. "Then what do you want, jerkoff?"

TPYMK looked straight into Bora's eyes, fixing him with the most threatening stare that the lion had ever come across in his long career as a police officer.

"Take one goddamn guess."

AN: Jesus… What a thrill ride! I'm immensely proud of this story, since things seemed to come together as well as they did in *Break* – but even better this time. It just feels so tense and dramatic. And the ending is just… wow. So, TPYMK has Bora cornered, Vitani wants out of the business, and Sarafina is still in Zira's clutches. Will all of this conclude in a thrilling finale that is sure to leave you breathless? Of course it will! So check back here next Friday for the thirteenth and final story of *Poison*! You do *not* want to miss it.